DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 132 584 CS 203 104

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TITLE The Non-Professional Degree in Mass Communication: A Study of Curriculum and Student Enrollment. AASDJ Studies on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, No. 3.
INSTITUTION American Association of Schools and Departments of Journalism.
PUB DATE Dec 75
NOTE 5p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Majors; College Programs; Degree Requirements; Higher Education; *Journalism; *National Surveys; *Program Descriptions
IDENTIFIERS *Nonprofessional Majors

ABSTRACT

A survey of 57 of the 61 schools accredited by the American Association of Schools and Departments of Journalism found seven schools offering a program of studies not designed to prepare students for vocations or careers in journalism. At these institutions an average of 10% of the junior/senior undergraduate majors--about 250 students nationwide--are considered to be in the nonprofessional track. Another 12 accredited schools are considering starting nonprofessional programs. Programs at the University of Washington, the University of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania State, and the University of Michigan are described in detail. (AA)

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ED132584

AASDJ STUDIES

on education in journalism and mass communication

Number Three December, 1975

The Non-Professional Degree in Mass Communication: A Study of Curriculum and Student Enrollment

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Published serially at Austin, Texas, by the American Association of Schools and Departments of Journalism, John B. Adams, president. The committee in charge consists of Edward P. Bassett, Harold L. Nelson, Albert T. Scroggins, Jr., and Wayne A. Danielson, chairman. Correspondence concerning the publication should be directed to the chairman at the School of Communication, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas, 78712. Distributed without charge to member schools of the AASDJ.

CS 203 104

Introduction

Skyrocketing enrollments in journalism schools have seemed to come at a time of stable or even declining job opportunities for graduates. This has led administrators within AASDJ to wonder whether professionally oriented degree programs should continue to dominate academic offerings for students interested in studying mass communication. Perhaps a less vocational plan of studies would meet many students' intellectual curiosities about fields of communication without whetting employment aspirations that may be difficult to satisfy.

Some schools already offer non-professional programs toward a baccalaureate degree. But little is known about their size or structure. This survey was undertaken to learn how prevalent non-professional studies are and how programs are organized where offered.

At the outset some potential confusions should be aired about the apparent misfit between enrollments and jobs. Our point will be to show how difficult it is to know whether we are over- or under-producing graduates.

By latest count, some 55,000 persons are pursuing undergraduate programs in journalism and mass communication in four-year institutions, a figure that has been rising by around 14 per cent annually since 1972 (Peterson, 1975). The total figure, and perhaps the rate of increase, is understated since enrollments are unknown at 40 schools beyond the 164 that reported in 1974.

The admissions policies that produced the current student body will yield about 18,000 degrees annually a couple years from now. A recent analysis of communication occupations in the U.S. (Parker, 1975) estimates there are about 150,000 reporters and editors working for various media.[1] If we assumed that about half of our 18,000 degree holders will want to become reporters and editors — for whatever medium — our programs could repopulate that sector of the labor force at a rate of every 17 years.[2]

This calculation makes the generous assumption that all degree winners who aspire to reporting and editing jobs are qualified to enter the field and would be able to perform satisfactorily.

There are other gaping assumptions that stand in the way of knowing whether or not we are oversupplying the labor market. We have no information about current rates of retirement and out-migration in communication jobs and only rough forecasts of trends in labor force needs for persons having the kinds of professional skills journalism schools seek to develop. We know nothing about the extent of hiring into communication jobs from non-journalism degree programs, from two-year programs, or about entry by persons without college or university preparation.

Further difficulties in comparing aggregate college and job populations result from differences among schools in the types of communication roles for which they prepare young people. These types often are not consistently indexed by familiar sequence designations like "news editorial" and "radio-television". Correspondence between these designations and employment designations in the labor census is also open to question.

We can guess with some confidence that most of our graduates who fail to find work that utilizes their professional training now will seek other kinds of employment and not switch in future years to fill whatever expanded need may develop for mass communicators.

Whether there is a disparity between educational program size and professional needs cannot be clearly discerned from job placement statistics either. For example, the most recent figures from The Newspaper Fund (1975) would seem to indicate that 62 per cent of 1974 undergraduate degree recipients found jobs in mass communication for which they were trained.

But this figure does not reflect the difficulties most schools face in knowing where their graduates go to work. Even the 106 reporting institutions could not ascertain job destinations for a third of their most recent graduates. And the 106 schools accounted for only half of the journalism degrees awarded in 1974. What is known about job placement is therefore based on an uncertain segment of about 37 per cent of degrees awarded — leaving room for slippage in any estimate of production/consumption ratios.

We have not even mentioned the philosophical issue of whether professional studies in communication should be organized around manpower policies and formulas. Or should freedom of student choice prevail, with its attendant shocks against institutional resources? These are issues touched by other AASDJ reports being prepared. The present survey simply notes the number and kind of non-professional studies offered in AASDJ schools.

The results reflect interviews with administrators at 57 of the 61 accredited schools during spring of 1975. We used the following language to describe the topic of our inquiry:

> We are interested in whether or not your (department or school) offers a program of studies that is non-professionally oriented. By this, we mean a program of studies toward the Bachelors degree in journalism or mass communication that is *not* designed to prepare students for vocations or careers in communication.

We were able to find seven schools with programs that fit this description. At these institutions an average of 10 per cent of the junior-senior undergraduate majors are considered to be in the non-professional track. This means about 250 students nationwide.

Stated another way, one per cent of all junior-senior majors among all the accredited schools are pursuing non-professional programs.

Another twelve accredited schools are considering starting a non-professional track. Their reasons for weighing this move are familiar. The need to educate consumers of media for their citizenship role is prominent. And we heard frequent mentions of the possible disparity between enrollments and jobs.

Schools that are not debating adding a non-professional track offered these explanations, among others:

> "We are strictly a training program"; "we have our hands full, and money is tight"; "there is a high demand for professional students (in the field)"; "we are practical only — no theory"; and "students want professional preparation."

Whether or not administrators we interviewed supervise a non-professional track, we found lively curiosity about programs that do. We asked administrators what they would like to find out. In response we describe in some detail four of the programs we found. They differ in philosophy and structure — and offer alternative models for programs that may be organized in the future.

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[1] About 39,000 of these are staffers for daily and weekly newspapers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1975). Many thousands more work at non-editorial jobs, of course — including approximately 85,000 in public relations, 150,000 in the management and creation of advertising, 17,000 staff announcers in radio and television, and so forth.

[2] Finely analyzed employment data for communication industries are difficult to find. The Aspen Institute has tentatively planned to collect some of this information in a *Guide to Major Media Trends*, a publication of many social indicators describing media structure, economics and content. For a recent attempt to collate media employment data that often elude Census categories, see Lavey (1974).

University of Washington

This is a highly structured program of study in which 18 of Washington's 380 undergraduates were enrolled during spring, 1975.

Like students in professional sequences, "Communication" majors complete basic courses in The Mass Media, The Communication Process, and Legal Aspects of Communications. These provide instruction in the organization, operation and control of media in America, communication processes and effects, and Constitutional and legal roots to publication in the mass media.

More advanced study is required in History and Communications and either Propaganda or Public Opinion and Communication. Four additional senior-level courses required are Communication Theory, Social Control and the Mass Media, Mass Communication Research, and International Communication Systems. Students are further required to elect one of three options — a course in Advertising Research, one in Government and Mass Communication, or one in Theory and Criticism of Broadcasting.

Four courses outside the School of Communications are added to the required list. These are Intellectual History of the United States (History Department), Political Processes and Public Opinion (Political Science), Social Psychology (in the Psychology Department) and Mass Communication (in Sociology).

These 51 credit hours (quarter) of advanced work compare with the following totals required of professional sequence majors: 18-22 for news editorial, 29-33 for broadcast journalism; 25-29 for advertising and 23-27 for radio/television. Students in all sequences must, however, complete at least 50 credits within the School. And all students complete College distribution requirements in the humanities, social and natural sciences to bring their total credit hours to 120 for graduation.

Students declare their sequence intentions when applying to the School for admission as majors — usually during their last quarter as sophomores or first quarter as juniors. Two of the basic courses must have been completed prior to admission; these are The Mass Media and The Communication Process. Applicants must have no more than 20 credits in Communication on their transcripts when applying.

Non-professional students may take professional sequence courses. But these would normally be elected beyond degree requirements.

University of Wisconsin

Wisconsin offers majors in Journalism with sequence, and a major without sequence. The latter is its non-professional program.

Both kinds of majors start from the same base of two courses elected among offerings that deal with communication processes and effects, basic courses in news writing and reporting, or a course in advertising principles. These two requirements represent 6-8 credit hours (semester) out of the 30-40 required for the major.

Non-professional students pick some of their additional courses from three clusters. Two of the clusters represent professional skills development, which means that the non-professional student takes at least two professional courses, and as many more as he or she cares to elect.

The first cluster, from which one offering must be elected, is a trio of skills courses in editing, broadcast news and advertising copy and layout. The second cluster, from which an additional offering must be elected, is a set of twelve advanced professional courses in writing, photo-journalism, broadcast news, advertising and public relations.

Students take two courses among the third cluster. This grouping is composed of offerings in communication theory, research methods, international communication, history and law. Some options are graduate seminars in which qualified undergraduates can mix with students studying for the M.A. or Ph.D degree.

After completing these options the non-professional student has a minimum of seven hours and as many as 19 hours to complete in Journalism, depending on prior choices. All the remaining 40 courses in the curriculum are open to the student.

Students also complete College distribution requirements. Before admission to the major, all Journalism students must present an application signed by an adviser, satisfactory score on English Usage Test, and must meet minimum GPA requirements.

Admission quotas are not maintained for the non-professional program. Students are free to switch from sequence to non-sequence, or the reverse. Sixty-one of Wisconsin's 415 upper-division majors were following the non-professional track in the spring of 1975.

Harold Nelson, director of the School at that time, reported no confusion over distinctions between sequence and non-sequence majors regarding job placement. Students receive faculty recommendations depending on their professional prospects and abilities. Some non-sequence majors are uninterested in careers in the media. Others have received equivalent, but different professional preparation than sequence majors and are recommended to potential employers.

Pennsylvania State University

Curriculum for students in this program is individually tailored with the help of a faculty adviser. Journalism and Speech Departments collaborate in offering the track.

A student interested in graduating in either department completes a core of three courses before declaring his non-professional major. These are a course in Communications and Society, offered by Journalism, and two courses in Speech — Rhetorical Foundations of Communication and Introduction to Human Communication Systems.

These courses provide grounding in alternative models of press structure and function in modern societies, analysis of rhetorical theories explaining communication processes and effects, and implications for communication from studies of perception, learning, signal transmission and various interpersonal processes.

The student is barred from professional courses (writing, reporting, broadcast news, etc.). Instead he or she and the adviser identify a minimum of 30 credit hours (semester) of liberal arts studies in Journalism and Speech and related areas outside either department. These 30 credits add to 70 credits that are completed to satisfy College distribution requirements. An additional 24 credits of electives completes undergraduate degree requirements.

Most non-professional students declare their major during the sophomore year.

Prof. Vince Norris serves as adviser to all the non-professional students in Journalism. During the 1974-75 academic year, five of Penn State's more than 400 undergraduates were enrolled in this track.

According to Prof. Art Barnes, non-professional graduates are rarely recommended for journalism jobs, and there is no evidence that potential employers confuse them with students who have pursued typical professional degree programs.

University of Michigan

Accredited professional studies in news editorial are lodged at the M.A. level at Michigan. The undergraduate degree is advertised as liberal arts studies not designed to prepare students for careers in print or broadcast journalism.

Nonetheless, students take some journalism skills courses. The aspiring major completes a course in the Social Role of the Mass Media (a survey of the structure and working processes of media and their effects on society) and two skills courses before applying. The skills courses are Basic News Writing and Writing for the Mass Media, both directed toward news writing and reporting for primarily the print media.

Admission is based on minimum GPA standards. The major goes on to take a course in communication law, Freedom of Expression, and four senior-level courses or undergraduate seminars. Selection is made from among liberal-arts courses dealing with media history, economics and management, international communication, research methods, media and the arts and other topics.

While Michigan faculty warn students not to expect full professional preparation from their undergraduate studies, surveys show that one out of four majors aspires to a journalistic career. Some go on to graduate work in journalism, often in Michigan's M.A. program which offers a combined B.A./M.A. track.

Other professionally motivated students make their interests known early enough to take advantage of program flexibility. They enroll in tutorial courses and work one-to-one with individual faculty on writing and reporting skills.

There appear to be few cases of confusion about the qualifications of graduates. Faculty make industry contacts and recommendations in behalf of those with professional abilities and motivations. For the most part, graduates without ability and motivation do not seek journalistic careers or do not solicit faculty support for their employment efforts.

Michigan has 126 undergraduate majors.

Summary

The variety in these non-professional programs is evident. Those at Penn State and Washington have structures that would reduce student pressure on professional courses, although enrollments are low in both cases. Wisconsin's would seem to have little effect on aggregate enrollment in professional courses, but opens a greater array of course packages students can elect to fulfill degree requirements.

Michigan's program combines a modest amount of skills course-work with liberal arts study — although work of each type can easily be taken beyond degree requirements through the device of special topic seminars and tutorial study.

Difficulties in determining employment needs for mass communicators and matching these to admissions policies make changes in the job market a precarious motive for starting non-professional tracks. There are other reasons for considering such programs, however. Reasons may be based on value judgments about educational needs in society, the special capabilities of particular universities to offer interdisciplinary studies, or a variety of other considerations.

In any event, while interest in starting non-professional programs is high, few institutions are offering these tracks right now, and a tiny number of students is enrolled.

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